THE NEW INDIAN EXPRESS

BENGALURU • WEDNESDAY • FEBRUARY 22, 2023 • ₹9.00 • PAGES 24 • LATE CITY EDITION

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STOCK MARKET TRADING HOURS MAY BE EXTENDED UP TO 5 PM

India's largest stock exchange, National Stock Exchange (NSE), plans to extend trading hours in the equity segment

NSE MAY ALLOW F&O TRADING TILL 11.55 PM

According to reports, the NSE is in preliminary discussions with market participants regarding extending trading hours up to 5 pm for equity derivative contracts. Currently, the domestic indices are open between 9.15 am and 3.30 pm. Meanwhile, reports suggest the NSE may stretch the futures and options (F&O) trading hours till as late as 11.55 pm

EXTEND HOURS IN CASE OF DISRUPTIONS: SEBI

- Last month, stock market regulator the Securities and Exchange Board of India came out with a standard operating procedure asking stock exchanges to inform about trading disruptions to stakeholders within 15 minutes of such occurrences and extending the trading time by one-and-a-half hours in certain outage conditions

6.15 hours

TOTAL ACTIVE TRADING HOURS ON NSE AND BSE, FROM 9.15 AM TO 3.30 PM NOW

CHENNAI • MADURAI • VIJAYAWADA • BENGALURU • KOCHI • HYDERABAD • VISAKHAPATNAM • COIMBATORE • KOZHIKODE • THIRUVANANTHAPURAM • BELAGAVI • BHUBANESWAR • SHIVAMOGGA • MANGALURU • TIRUPATI • TIRUCHY • TIRUNELVELI • SAMBALPUR • HUBBALLI • DHARMAPURI • KOTTAYAM • KANNUR • VILLUPURAM • KOLLAM • TADEPALLIGUDEM • NAGAPATTINAM • THRISSUR • KALABURAGI

Putin ups ante, suspends last N-pact with US

Says West is provoking conflict by giving weapons to Ukraine; Washington says it's ready for talks to limit arms race

YESHI SELI @ New Delhi

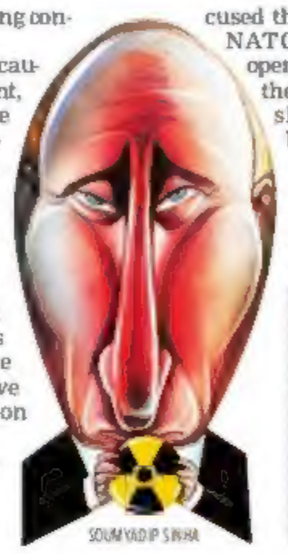
IN a serious escalation of nuclear risk, Russian president Vladimir Putin on Tuesday declared that Moscow was suspending its participation in the New START treaty — its last nuclear nonproliferation accord with the US.

In his state-of-the-nation address, Putin said Russia wouldn't hesitate to resume nuclear weapons tests if the US does so, portending the end of a global ban on nuclear weapons tests in place since Cold War times.

Putin's declaration came a day after US President Joe Biden made a surprise visit to Kyiv and taunted the Russian president over the ongoing conflict in Ukraine.

The US chose to react cautiously to the development, with Secretary of State Antony Blinken terming it 'deeply unfortunate and irresponsible', adding that the US will be "watching carefully to see what Russia actually does". He added: "We are ready to talk about strategic arms limitations at any time with Russia irrespective of anything else going on in the world."

Explaining his decision to suspend Russia's obligations under New START, Putin accused the US and its NATO allies of openly declaring the goal of Russia's defeat in Ukraine. "They want to inflict a strategic defeat on us and try to get to our nuclear facilities at the same time," he said.



SOUMYADIP SINHA

Putin added that while the US has asked for resumption of inspections of Russian nuclear facilities under the treaty, NATO allies had helped Ukraine mount drone attacks on Russian air bases hosting nuclear-capable strategic bombers.

During his two-hour monologue, Putin clarified that Russia is only suspending its involvement in New START and not entirely withdrawing from the pact.

New START is a treaty between the US and Russia to reduce and limit offensive arms. Signed in 2010 by former US president Barack Obama and Russian president Dmitry Medvedev, the accord limits each country's strategic nuclear warheads at 1,550 and long-range missiles and bombers at 700. The pact envisages on-site inspections. Days before the treaty was to expire in February 2021, Russia and the US agreed to extend it for five more years. P12

WASN'T PLOTTING TO ATTACK RUSSIA, SAYS BIDEN

Hours after Putin's speech, Biden said the West was not plotting to attack Russia. Biden, who is in Poland after his surprise trip to Kyiv, said: "The US and the nations of Europe do not seek to control or destroy Russia," adding, "This war is never a necessity. It's a tragedy. President Putin chose this war."

Roopa, Rohini shunted out without posting

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Bengaluru

A DAY after reprimanding two top women bureaucrats for engaging in a tiff publicly, the state government on Tuesday issued orders shunting out IPS officer Roopa D Moudgil and IAS officer Rohini Sindhuri Dasari, without any posting. This was meant to send a loud and clear message to bureaucrats that indiscipline will not be tolerated. The government has also transferred Roopa's IAS officer husband, Munish Moudgil.

The spat between the officers on social media and public platforms, making allegations against each other, had embarrassed the state government.

The pressure was mounting on the state government from various circles, including cabinet ministers, on the need to punish them for indiscipline.

IGP Roopa, who was the Managing Director of Karnataka State Handicrafts Development Corporation Limited, has now been transferred without posting while Rohini Sindhuri, who was Commissioner for Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowments, has also been transferred without a posting.

The officers have been punished for violation of service conduct rules and sent on indefinite leave by not giving them any posting.

IGP Roopa D Moudgil (left) and IAS officer Rohini Sindhuri

Meanwhile, Munish Moudgil, who was Commissioner, Survey Settlement & Land Records, has been transferred and posted until further orders as principal secretary, Department of Personnel and Administrative Reforms.

Rohini has been replaced by Basavarajendra H, who was Joint Secretary, Department of Skill Development, Entrepreneurship and Livelihood, while Roopa has been replaced by Bharathi D, who was awaiting a posting. Munish is replaced by CN Sreedhara, who was the Additional Director, Department of Survey Settlement and Land Records. Meanwhile, Darshan HV, awaiting posting, has been made Commissioner, Tumakuru Municipal Corporation, replacing Yogananda. P4

Whopping 1,100 forest fires in a week

JITENDRA CHOUBEY @ New Delhi

WITH temperatures soaring above normal, India witnessed a whopping 1,156 forest fires during last week, pulling down the air quality index significantly. As many as 12 Indian states had significant forest fire incidents so far (see map).

According to NASA's Fire Information for Resource Management System, the spatial resolution of the Visible Infrared Imaging Radiometer Suite satellite shows forest fire incidents across India, with high concentration in parts of South India, Odisha and the Northeast. Chances of the fires originating from burning farm residue are remote, since the rabi harvesting season is yet to start.

MOST POLLUTED INDIAN CITIES IN REAL-TIME

City	AQI
Mullanpur, Punjab	310
Alandi, Maharashtra	218
Delhi	194
Ahmedabad, Gujarat	184
Hosur, Tamil Nadu	176
Kolkata, West Bengal	174
Mumbai, Maharashtra	173

"If you superimpose NASA's images with that of the air quality index, you will can easily correlate the forest fires with the poor air quality," says Chandra Bhushan, a Delhi-based environmentalist. According to Swiss firm IQAir, air quality in India at 9 pm on Tuesday fell into the severe to unhealthy category in cities like Delhi, Gandhinagar, Kolkata, Mumbai, Hosur and Mullanpur (see table).

High temperatures and extreme dryness create conditions for a natural fire. During the past week (13-20 Feb), maximum temperatures in the 35-39°C range prevailed over Gujarat, Maharashtra, West Rajasthan and Goa and coastal Karnataka, which is 4-9°C above normal. Temperatures are climbing by 5-9°C above normal even in the North.

The map shows forest fires tracked by a NASA satellite from February 13 to 21 in India. Many such fires are due to human activity and are preventable, a Forest Survey of India report said

5-YR-OLD BOY MAULED TO DEATH BY STRAY DOGS IN HYD

The boy was walking down a lane, carrying some food, when five stray dogs brutally attacked him. The dogs pushed him to the ground and bit all over. His father found him bleeding profusely | P5

Trees have been shedding leaves across Bengaluru as summer sets in | VINOD KUMAR T

BLURU MERCURY LEVELS IN FEB

Feb 17, 2005
35.9°C

Feb. 6, 1887
9.4°C

Total rainfall in wettest month:
88.9 mm in 1932

67.3 mm in Feb 22, 1901, heaviest rain in 24 hours

Summer all set to arrive early this year in K'taka

BOSKY KHANNA @ Bengaluru

WARM, sweaty days are all set to arrive in the state. The India Meteorological Department (IMD) has forecast an early onset of summer in the state from February 24, instead of the normal March 1. It has also forecast a dry weather with rise in temperature in the days to come. The reason is being attributed to the prevalence of northerly and north-westerly winds which are warm.

"Above normal maximum temperature is already being recorded in some parts of Karnataka. In case of Bengaluru, though the temperature is hovering around 31-32 degrees Celsius, citizens are feeling the heat as the relative humidity level is around 20-35 per cent," a senior IMD official told *The New Indian Express*.

The official pointed out that usually during February, Bengaluru receives a normal rainfall of 7mm, but it has not happened this year. Also, the next five days will see a dry summer heat spell, he predicted.

There is also no rain and no cloud formation. Moisture adjunction is also taking place which reduces the chances of a downpour.

Normally, parts of north India continue to feel the winter chills during February, but the temperature has started to get warmer there too and the winds blowing from north India are also warm. This is also because of change in wind direction and anti-cyclone effect, the official added.

Jaishankar lights into Rahul on China policy

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ New Delhi

EXTERNAL Affairs Minister S Jaishankar on Tuesday lit into Congress leader Rahul Gandhi for his frequent criticism of India's China policy, which the latter claims is defensive.

"I ask people if we were being accommodative, who sent the Indian Army to the LA. Rahul Gandhi did not send them. Narendra Modi sent them," Dr Jaishankar told a news agency in a wide-ranging interview. He reiterated that at present India has the largest peacetime deployment in its history on the China border. "We are keeping troops there at a huge cost with great effort. We have increased our infrastructure spending on the border five times in this government. Now tell me who is the defensive and accommodative person? Who is actually telling the truth? Who is depicting things accurately? Who is playing footsie with history?" he said. However, Jaishankar said he would listen to Rahul if he had "superior knowledge and wisdom" on China.

"All I can say in my defence is I have been the longest-serving ambassador in China. I have been dealing with a lot of these border issues for a very long time. I am not suggesting that I am necessarily the most knowledgeable person, but I would have a fairly good self-opinion of my understanding of what is up there. If he (Rahul) has superior knowledge and wisdom on China, I am always willing to listen. As I said, for me life is a learning process. If that is a possibility, I have never closed my mind to anything however improbable that may be," he said.

Mesta death: Cases against 112 withdrawn

SUBHASH CHANDRA NS @ Karwar

THE state government has withdrawn cases against 112 people, mostly Hindu activists, in the case of Paresh Mesta's death which took place in 2017 and had led to communal riots in Honnavar district.

Mesta (19), was found dead in Uttar Kannada district's Honnavar following clashes in the area. His body was recovered on December 8 from Shettikere lake in the city, soon after which communal riots broke out in the area.

Terming it a murder, right-wing organisations, workers of BJP, Bajrang Dal activists and a local MLA had protested against Mesta's death and were arrested. The Cabinet on Monday decided to withdraw cases against the activists in Bhatkal, Honnavar, Kumta and Karwar registered against them in 2018 by the then Congress government.

Chief Minister Basavaraj Bommai withdrew all the cases against the activists. Earlier 26 cases were withdrawn. P6

"Many of us were just picked up by the police and booked. We had nothing to do with the case. I run a pan shop in Sirsi

Anand Mudi, who was booked